

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Alexander Melville Bell, Eliza Symonds Bell, Carrie Bell, December 1, 1871, with transcript

Copy of a letter written by Alexander Graham Bell to his parents and Carrie. Newton Lower Falls, Mass., December 1st, 1871. Dear Papa, Mama and Carrie:

I cannot describe to you the effect produced by my Exhibition of Wednesday. All the influential Educationalists of Boston were present. Theresa Dudley read from the symbols words in German, French and Zulu — introducing clicks. I invited the audience to dictate words in any language . Theresa Dudley did not fail in a solitary instance. The best of it is she does not know yet that she uttered words at all. She then read the Lord's Prayer slowly but p erfectly . She has not yet the power of fluent and distinct utterance. I illustrated that she could vary the “timbre” of her voice at will — could inflect it mechanically — and could appreciate certain musical intervals. Alice Jennings (also totally deaf) inflected her voice beautifully — and I illustrated the way in which a feeling could be associated with each Inflection. She also appreciated r elative pitch — and sang do mi sol do perfectly. I said I had been anxious to ascertain how far the power of appreciating musical intervals could be educated — but having more important work to do, I had not made the attempt with these pupils. Miss Fuller however had permitted me to experiment upon the voice of one of the pupils of the school and I should now exhibit what I considered as “a scientific curiosity — perhaps of little practical utility — namely the 2 phenomenon of a deaf person mechanically singing.” Miss Flagg sang the scale d. r. m. f. s. l. t. d. following the motions of my hand and then without knowing it gave perfectly “God save the Queen” I Miss Flagg then recited beautifully the dispute about the thrushes and starlings. “Here Cicely take away my gun.” I had to alter a few of the words that she might pronounce them well. “Cicely” would be beyond her reach — I changed it to “Emma.”

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Inflections — gestures — looks were given perfectly naturally. The piece was done with fine expression.

Various gentlemen then got up and made beautiful speeches. Prof. Monroe and Prof. Churchill were present and spoke. Finally Hon. George B. Emerson LL.D. proposed that this meeting should appoint a Committee for the purpose of drawing up a suitable Report of this Exhibition for publication. This was seconded by Prof. Monroe and was carried unanimously. The following constitute the Committee appointed:

Hon. George B. Emerson, Chairman — Mr. Philbrick, Superintendent of Public Schools — Prof. Monroe and Prof. Churchill. I have suggested since that they should draw up a full report — which I should be happy to publish in a pamphlet form. At the meeting it was only proposed to let the papers have a suitable report of the Proceedings. But as I believe this experiment constitutes an epoch in the History of the Education of the Deaf and Dumb I am anxious to have their report in some more permanent form.

Some time ago I asked Mr. Philbrick's advice about the 3 foundation of a Normal School in Boston. He so thoroughly coincided with me that without referring to my name, he said publicly at the Exhibition that it had been suggested that a Normal School should be founded in Boston and urged me strongly to return and found this. Prof. Monroe then spoke in the same strain followed by all the speakers — each one referred to this. They said that in Boston I was now well known and that it was to the Interests of the Bostonians “to use this gentleman — not to use him up” or something to that effect.

I feel so much interest in the work that I cannot go from Institution to Institution without working . I know perfectly well that under these circumstances it would not be long before I would follow my brothers. You do not, I think, appreciate the labour that I had in the spring at the Boston School and to go over the same at Northampton and Hartford and produce no greater results than in the Boston School would I think be madness for the system and for m y physical system .

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We want to produce higher and even higher results. We want to found a Central Establishment where the system may be sent over the world. It is not for me to kill myself by running over an immense field. I should concentrate my powers upon a few pupils and teach teachers. Now is the time to do this — now that the interest of influential men has been thoroughly aroused. I propose on the score of my health throwing up my engagements in Northampton and Hartford and founding this Institution in Boston on the 1st of 4 March — the Birthday of the inventor of the system. Looked at from a pecuniary point of view — it would give me less work — a great deal more pay and a recognized position. Instead of going to Northampton and Hartford for two months each I propose that they send a teacher to me for four months. Montreal and New York will certainly send teachers. The pupils I have been obliged to refuse belong to wealthy families and would pay any amount to have their children under my care.

Can take four teachers together for 1 hour. (Northampton teacher for four months \$500

)Hartford teacher for four months \$500

(New York teacher for four months \$500

)Montreal teacher for four months \$500

One hour Miss Lippit (instr. at \$5 per lesson) \$400

One hour Miss Brooks (ditto) \$400

Miss Adams (another course of 12 lessons) 50

Mrs. Sanders (ditto) 50

(One hour) Appointment oversight of Artic. Dep. at the Boston School.

Appointment to teach the teachers of Primary School.

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Minimum amount I can make during March, April, May, June. \$2900

My class of teachers can witness what I do with Miss Lippit and Miss Brooks and assist me for one hour in the Boston School and have one hour's theoretical instruction besides. Thus 5 I can make about \$2800 during those four months with only four hours labor to myself.

Before I settle definitely I want your advice. Miss Fuller showed that the symbols had been taught to a child so young as to be almost an infant. The little darling was so wee that she had to stand upon a chair to be seen. She was born deaf.

Yours affectionately, A. Graham Bell. P. S. If the Report will be published in a pamphlet form I shall send a copy to every Institution in the country — and announce the foundation of the Normal School. AGB.